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SHORT STORIES

EDITED BY
C. ARTHUR PEARSON (OF PEARSON'S WEEKLY)

No. 336. FOR WEEK ENDING JUNE 8, 1895. [PRICE ONE PENNY.

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SHORT STORIES.

EDITED BY C. ARTHUR PEARSON.

No. 336.] FOR THE WEEK ENDING JUNE 8, 1895. [PRICE ONE PENNY.

WORDS THAT PAINT AND PICTURES THAT SPEAK

CHAPTER I.

"ADORATION is ignorance," she was saying, as the great rocking-chair swayed lazily backwards and forwards in front of the fire, to the imminent peril of a fragile wicker table on which the tea-things were spread.

Her companion moved a little silver vase filled with hot-house flowers and deposited his cup on the mantel-piece before he turned and faced her.

"What are you talking of?" he said. "Men or things?"

The girl leant forward clasping her hands round her knees, and laughed.

"The beautiful in art appeals only to the artist," she answered in her deliberate way. "Of course, I was speaking of men. Our sincerest admiration is reserved for those about whom we know little or nothing. That is what I mean."

"'Familiarity breeds contempt,'" he quoted. "It is not exactly an original thought."

"Perhaps not. But, you see, I was looking at it from the other point of view."

"*Apropos* of what? If I had not seen such a great deal of you since we came down here I might flatter myself——"

"Please don't," she interrupted, with a little deprecating gesture. "The great beauty of being cousins is that we need not pay each other compliments."

They were standing together on the hearth now. The man in his pink coat and muddy boots and spurs, the tall, graceful girl at his side in the pretty mauve tea-gown for which her shopping habit had been changed.

"You entirely misunderstand the benefits of the relationship," he said, with a tinge of disappointment in his voice. "But, if it is not me, who or what is it, may I ask, that has put you into this philosophic mood?"

"It's no good telling you," she answered, staring down into the grate. "You would only laugh. Men of the world never can understand anything but the common-place."

"Look here, most beautiful woman, if you talk like that, I'm going."

She allowed him to reach the door without a word, and then she looked up and called him back.

"My dear boy, how dense you are," she said. "Can't you see how I am longing to unburden myself, and to get a little sympathy?"

He came back—not very graciously—and seated himself on the music-stool with an air of mock resignation.

"To tell you the truth," the girl said, leaning her elbow on the piano and looking down on him, "I have fallen in love—genuinely and desperately in love—with a man whom I have never seen."

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"Impossible!"

"But nevertheless a fact."

"And you think that if you knew him the illusion would be dispelled?"

"Yes. Adoration, as I said just now, is ignorance."

The man turned round and began strumming a few notes on the piano.

"If I were a journalist," he said, "I would write an article on the littleness of greatness, or the superiority of names over people."

"I am not in love with a name."

"Then what in the world are you in love with?"

"With the wonderful personality of which every line of the man's work seems to speak."

"So he is an author then?"

"Yes."

"And you imagine you can tell what sort of a man he is from the way he writes. It's absolute nonsense, my dear girl. A style may be characteristic, but an author never says what he really thinks in a book."

"Perfectly true, O Solomon! I do not suppose for a moment I know the real man. I am in love with the ideal.

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Led the way across the prettily furnished room.

Not with the author of 'A Broken Altar,' but with my conception of him."

"With the hero of the book, in other words—like most other women of course, you confound the author with characters he creates."

The girl laughed.

"With what the hero would have been if he had been allowed to live, perhaps. He is a machine instead of flesh and blood. He says things and does things because the author puts words in his mouth and pulls wires. In real life such a man would have been perfect."

The girl had resumed her seat and was rocking herself backwards and forwards again and smiling. Her companion watched her with amused contempt in his look and reverence in his heart. She was an enigma to him; his efforts to understand were always futile.

"It must be a great assistance in your work," he remarked, thoughtfully referring to her gift of reading between the lines and catching the reflection of words.

"Illustrating stories would be quite impossible without the knack of meeting the author half way. The best novelists leave the reader to write half their book, and the artist has to help them. Come and see my studio."

He followed her as she rose and led the way across the prettily furnished room into the hall, where their appearance was greeted by a low growl of pleasure from a magnificent boar hound, which rose leisurely from the broad circle of light in front of the fire, and came over the polished boards to meet them.

At the same moment the girl was conscious of a quick furtive glance from her companion.

"Do you recognise him?" she asked, and the white hand laid affectionately on the broad smooth head trembled a little in spite of herself.

"'Peter the Great!' How long have you had him?"

It was asked carelessly, with an evident effort to make the question appear nothing more than a polite endeavour to be interested, but there was an unmistakable note of jealousy in the man's voice.

"Only a month. Lord Worthington gave him to me at Christmas. Wasn't it kind of him?"

To this the man vouchsafed no response, but he muttered something under his breath, and the girl knew that he was taking someone else's name in vain, and laughed.

Passing through a swing door at the further end of the hall they entered a narrow corridor, when the young artist was the first to break the silence by looking back over her shoulder and saying:

"Don't forget the promise you made this morning, Duncan, never to breathe a word of what I am doing to anyone. If the mater knew I was illustrating stories for the magazines, instead of copying family portraits or painting lifeless landscapes, I believe she would send me off to a convent."

And with this word of admonition she turned the key of her studio and ushered her visitor into a lofty room, one side of which was taken up almost entirely by an enormous window, which, however, was now partially covered by the half drawn curtain. In this magnificent abode of Art no furniture was allowed to find admission except the oldest and rarest oak, and the high panelling on the walls was of the same material, and exquisitely carved by Lady Evelyn's own hand—a fact which she duly announced to her cousin. The broad settees were heaped with luxurious cushions, and an immense Persian carpet occupied the centre of the polished floor.

At the further end of the room stood several easels covered with heavy cloths; but contenting herself with merely pointing these out, the girl led the way to a writing-table near the fire, on which a heap of proofs and pen-and-ink sketches were scattered.

"Here are the opening chapters of 'A Broken Altar,'" she said, turning the galleys over in her hand. "It is not nearly finished yet, but it is already being published in the *Illustrated London News* as a serial story, which makes my work a great deal harder."

"And the gifted author's name is——?"

"Guy Provost."

"I have never heard of him before."

"Nor have I. This is his first novel, I believe."

"Lucky man."

"Why?" with a little, conscious laugh.

Her companion did not answer. He had picked up an advance copy of the paper from a low stool by the fender and stood with his back to Lady Evelyn, turning over the pages.

"It is a love story," he said presently.

"Yes—so far."

"And you have drawn yourself as the heroine."

"No," half indignantly, "I don't flatter myself that I am quite so good-looking as that."

"But it is you," he persisted.

"It is what I would like to be if I could make myself."

"Blessed are they who do not fish. Come here, Evelyn."

The request surprised her, but she crossed over to his side obediently.

"Now look in the glass."

Standing on tip-toe on the fender Lady Evelyn saw her own image in the mirror side by side with a full-page illustration of a remarkably pretty girl, who was stooping down and unfastening the muzzle of a wretched, starving dog who had found a delicious bone that it could just lick with its tongue and nothing more.

"There is a certain resemblance," she confessed, looking from the one to the other and thinking that, after all, she must be more beautiful than she had ever supposed. "But I give you my word of honour, Duncan, I did not mean it. You don't think the mater will guess?"

"She must notice the likeness," the man said, not very consolingly.

"But she won't know who drew the picture!"

"Considering that it is signed with a *nom de guerre*, perhaps not."

Lady Evelyn drew a sigh of relief. Her companion turned over a fresh page. The next moment a sudden exclamation broke from his lips.

Controlling his emotions with no little difficulty, he turned round and faced his cousin.

"Who was your model for the hero of this story?" he asked, holding out the paper and placing his finger sternly on the figure of a young man who was depicted in the act of stepping from a hansom cab on to the pavement in front of a West-end club.

His manner startled the girl.

"No one," she said. "What do you mean? Why are you looking at me like that?"

She took the paper, glanced at the offending illustration, and suddenly turned crimson as it flashed across her that the figure she had drawn was a fac-simile of no one else in the world but "Peter the Great's" late master.

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For a moment she did not know whether to laugh or to cry at her situation. It was certainly embarrassing and undignified, and her cousin's reproachful stare made her feel unaccountably guilty.

"So Lord Worthington is your idea of Mr. Guy Provost, personified in his hero; no wonder you have fallen so deeply in love with him!"

"Lord Worthington is nothing of the sort," replied Lady Evelyn indignantly. "I never thought of him once when I drew that picture. Do you think a man like that could write such a clever book as 'A Broken Altar'? The likeness is the merest accident; I promise you it is, Duncan . . . If you don't leave off laughing I shall never speak to you again. . . . Duncan, I hate you!"

Her companion took no notice of this outburst.

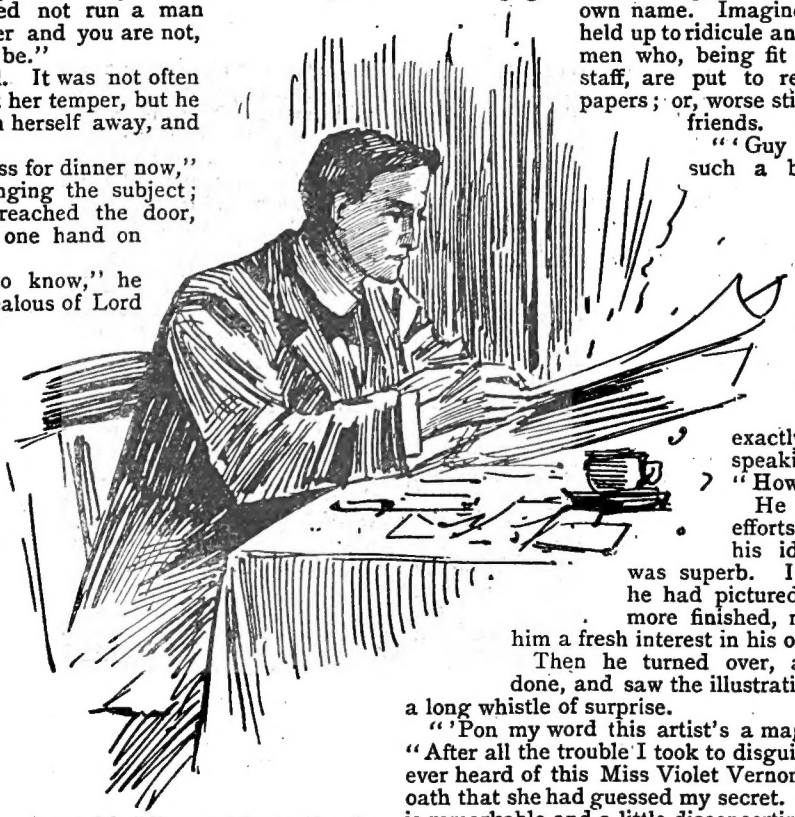
"You are profaning your old friends," he said, "and will be sorry for it when you find that Mr. Provost, whoever he may be, is only an ordinary mortal after all."

"He is no such ordinary mortal as you or Lord Worthington, at all events. You need not run a man down because he is clever and you are not, however jealous you may be."

Duncan Stuart laughed. It was not often that my Lady Evelyn lost her temper, but he knew that she had given herself away, and understood.

"I must go up and dress for dinner now," he said, suddenly changing the subject; "*Au revoir.*" As he reached the door, however, he turned with one hand on the handle.

"If it interests you to know," he said, "I am far more jealous of Lord Worthington than of your precious author. We reserve our sincerest admiration for those whom we know least, as you have been kind enough to explain to me this afternoon. But when, in our anxiety to pay homage to the unknown, we take to ourselves the image of some familiar friend as the nearest approach to the ideal—it is, my dear cousin, a very serious symptom." And thereupon he closed the door.



A copy of the "Illustrated London News."

CHAPTER II.

BREAKFAST was always served at a little table drawn near the window when Lord Worthington was alone at the castle. Several vases of rare exotics ornamented the centre of the cloth, and the warm glow of the beech logs blazing cheerfully in the wide, old-fashioned hearth flashed on the silver coffee-pot and service. A pile of letters and newspapers lay by the side of the solitary place which had been set, and the smoking dish covers betokened that everything was ready with the exception of his lordship himself.

At five minutes past nine a tall, leisurely-looking individual opened the door and strolled towards the table. The expression of the handsome, clean-shaven face did not betray any particular talent or genius. It was that of a young man, well under thirty, with smoothly brushed black hair, blue eyes, regular features, and the most charming manners in the world. With all his good looks, however, Lord Worthington was not conceited. Perhaps it may have been that he belonged to that limited and probably mythical class of men and women who are sufficiently conscious of their own attractions and superiority to be more or less indifferent to them.

Lord Worthington did not profess to have any ambitions in life beyond those of the ordinary country gentleman. He frankly confessed an abhorrence of politics, and avowed a preference for friends of a sporting type. No one, as a matter of fact, expected anything more from him. The last thing, however, which most men are is what they appear to be.

On this particular morning Lord Worthington evinced something very much like excitement as he caught sight of the contents of the letter-bag lying beside his plate. He looks through them quickly, and everything is thrown aside except a long yellow envelope marked IMMEDIATE and a copy of the *Illustrated London News*, which he unrolls and opens out with the nearest approach to haste that he ever permits himself.

"I wonder what on earth people would think if they knew I was writing a Socialist novel—*with a moral!*" he thought as he smoothed the paper out with his hand and began turning over the pages. "Thank goodness I did not write under my own name. Imagine the ignominy of being held up to ridicule and criticised by the young men who, being fit for nothing else on the staff, are put to reviewing books for their papers; or, worse still, being chaffed by one's friends.

"'Guy Provost!' That's not such a bad *nom-de-plume* after all," he reflected, as he propped the paper against the loaf and ran his eye quickly down the double column of type.

At this moment he noticed for the first time the illustration on the opposite page and gave a little start of pleasure.

"That's it! that's it exactly!" he exclaimed, speaking unconsciously aloud. "How magnificently drawn!"

He had rather dreaded the efforts of someone else to put his ideas into form, but this was superb. It was the scene just as he had pictured it all to himself, only more finished, more complete. It gave him a fresh interest in his own work.

Then he turned over, as the other man had done, and saw the illustration of the hero and drew a long whistle of surprise.

"'Pon my word this artist's a magician!" he ejaculated. "After all the trouble I took to disguise myself, too. If I had ever heard of this Miss Violet Vernon before I would take my oath that she had guessed my secret. As it is, the coincidence is remarkable and a little disconcerting."

He read through the first instalment of his story, and went on with the proofs; and when he had finished he wiped his forehead, and said something about the room reminding him of a Turkish bath.

He had never seen his own thoughts in print before, and he felt half ashamed of them now that they faced him in black and white. On the whole, however, he was contented,—far more, indeed, than he had expected to be—with his own handiwork. The story, so far as it went, was certainly clever, and decidedly well written. In fact he was rather surprised at his own success.

Criticising the novel from the most impartial standpoint, he felt that there was a certain artificiality about his characters. The attempt to metamorphose himself, under a careful disguise, into a hero, had not been altogether unsuccessful, but he could not help noticing that the heroine was a little unnatural, and the emotions of both rather too mechanical to enlist the sympathies of the reader in the human interests of the story.

"The socialism is admirable," his lordship thought to

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himself as he crossed over to the fireplace and lighted a cigarette, "but the love story has a suspiciously fictitious air about it. The truth of the matter is, I suppose, that I am writing about a subject of which I know very little."

And, indeed, Lord Worthington, society man that he was, had never been engaged in a serious love affair or felt his heart beating for a woman.

"I have taken too much care of myself, confound it," he meditated, as he stared from his place of vantage on the hearth at the wintry landscape outside. "One must have experience before one writes, and my education has been neglected. I suppose there would really be plenty of time now before I attempt to finish my story. Only——"

He broke off abruptly, startled at his own thoughts.

After all, he was not quite sure whether a man would be justified in carrying on a flirtation with a girl merely to become conversant with the mysterious way of lovers. There could be no doubt, however, that this was the only step to take if he wished to make his story true to life. It would be easy enough to write about the real thing while undergoing all the sensations and to describe the inevitable little scenes while living in an atmosphere of such soft influences.

He was still setting forth the pros and cons of this ethical problem, and giving them all a most conscientious scrutiny, when his eye happened to fall on the copy of the *Illustrated London News* which still lay open on the table.

"I know that face reminds me of someone," he exclaimed, taking up the paper and giving a closer inspection than he had yet bestowed on the portrait of the girl illustrating his own story.

He stared at it stupidly for a moment, and then a light broke across his face.

"Lady Evelyn, of course! What a curious likeness. Why in the world did I not think of her as my heroine? Why——"

For the second time he left a sentence unfinished, and with the air of a man who has made a sudden determination and does not mean to allow the grass to grow under his feet, he swung round on his heels and rang the bell.

"Tell Stevens," he said, as the footman appeared, "to saddle the grey at once, and say I shall want one of the chestnuts as a second horse."

Then he looked at his watch.

"There is plenty of time if I am quick," he mused, moving towards the door. "The hounds meet at the kennels to-day and Lady Evelyn is sure to be there. Knowing the young lady's reputation I need not feel any qualms about playing the *rôle* of lover to her, and then—heigh ho! for a place on a pedestal among the great writers of the day."

CHAPTER III.

TWO months had passed. The story was progressing in a way which the author had never dreamed of when he first took up his pen to write. "A Broken Altar" was undoubtedly the novel of the year. Everyone was asking who Guy Provost was, and nobody knew. The editor was reticent on the subject, and in spite of the ceaseless efforts of the busy interviewer the secret never leaked out. And meanwhile the circulation of the paper went up by leaps and bounds. Such a boom had never been known before at the offices of the "News."

One cold clear evening early in March, Lord Worthington, with a gun under his arm and a solitary spaniel at his heels, was walking down a narrow woodland track which led from the park gates to the keeper's cottage. His whole attitude was one of despair or of deepest depression, and it was not difficult to see that his mind was occupied with thoughts of the most disagreeable and lugubrious nature. The stooping shoulders, the down-cast eyes, the heavy listless tread, all spoke of grave mental disquietude or abject misery pitiful to watch.

A young crescent moon shone down through the leafless branches of the trees. Under foot the ground was moist and sodden, and there was a certain freshness in the air which spoke of recent showers. A stile on the further side of the thick underwood was faintly visible in the deepening twilight, and turning aside from the beaten path he had been following Lord Worthington made his way towards it, and, leaning wearily against the wooden rail, he buried his face in his hands and remained apparently wrapped in meditation. Every now and then a stifled sob broke from him, and his whole frame shook.

At last, however, he seemed in some measure to regain his composure.

"What a fool I am to break down like this!" he exclaimed. "I have no one but myself to thank for all my misery. If a man must needs play with fire, he has no right to cry at a burn."

He laughed at the platitude, but it brought him no consolation or comfort. The terrible wound in his heart was too recent to be forgotten. Sitting there in the falling darkness he went over and over again the story of his misfortune, of the search after the knowledge of love—begun in jest and ending with the real and awful suffering of a broken heart.

How this passion had sprung into life he hardly understood. It had come upon him unexpectedly. Only a few days ago he was on his quest for a new experience, and Lady Evelyn was nothing more to him than a pleasant companion—an interesting psychological study. And now it had come to this! He had been sent about his business.

He thought of his newly acquired fame in the world of letters and laughed for the second time. He thought of the thousands and thousands of human beings who sympathised with his story and thought of himself—alone and friendless in the world.

. . . . . .

Late that night Lord Worthington retired to his library to write. He felt unusually disinclined for the task, but the editor was clamouring for the next instalment of his story and there was no alternative. For a long time he paced up and down the room, to and fro, to and fro, trying to collect his thoughts. Things were going very smoothly indeed with the hero of "A Broken Altar." It was as well, perhaps, that this should happen in a romance of fiction, as it so seldom did in real life. And then a new thought came to his lordship. As he had been made to suffer, others should suffer, too. The idea pleased him. He seized his pen and sat down and began to write.

He would put his character to torture just as he had been tortured that day.

And presently, as he wrote, there came to him something like relief.

CHAPTER IV.

NOW it is probable that on this particular evening no one in the world was half so unhappy as the Lady Evelyn herself. From the most unfortunate and long-repented moment when Duncan Stuart had been initiated into the secret of her studio she had lived in a constant state of alarm. Unintentional as the double likeness had been, it could not be denied or overlooked, and it was quite impossible to meet Lord Worthington without wondering whether he was reading Guy Provost's story in the *Illustrated London News*.

The thought was sufficiently embarrassing to make her look and feel uncomfortable. No one is more conscious of guilt than the innocent.

There was some satisfaction in the reflection that he could never know who the artist was if Duncan Stuart could be trusted, but she had not the most implicit faith in that young gentleman, who had taken to chaffing her unmercifully on the subject.

In her fury she made up her mind to avoid the innocent cause of her misery as much as possible until the hateful story was finished. This, however, was easier said than done. The more she tried to escape him the more determined he appeared to see her. The meetings which had once been of rare occurrence had now become almost daily.

The evil-minded Duncan observed this and made the most of his opportunity. He pointed out that from the very day on which the first instalment of Guy Provost's story had appeared Lord Worthington's attention had become more

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marked. Only one thing could be deduced from that. His lordship was evidently under the impression that some mutual friend was endeavouring by this somewhat novel means to bring about a not altogether undesirable match, and was by no means loth to take the hint.

Lady Evelyn was furious.

To make matters worse, the likeness in the illustrations could not be altered. As she had begun it was necessary that she should go on to the bitter end. She had almost come to hating the unknown author of "A Broken Altar." As if she had not enough to bear already, his characters were continually meeting and talking, and behaving in a way which reminded her of sundry little incidents in her unwished-for intercourse with Lord Worthington.

And then the climax had come. Lord Worthington had taken her by surprise, and offered her his undying devotion. She refused him, of course. Under the circumstances there was nothing else to be done—and then she was sorry.

Deep down in her heart she knew that she had fallen in love with this man. When she came to think the matter over in the solitude of her bedroom, she could find nothing but the fear of what Duncan Stuart would say that had influenced her decision. A sort of numbness came over her. All that night, and for many a weary day afterwards, she suffered with horrible acuteness. All the joy and pleasure in life seemed to be gone. And there was no one to whom she could go for consolation—except Guy Provost. In the misery of the last few weeks she had almost forgotten him, and now she began to look forward to the day when the next batch of proofs would arrive in order to comfort herself by reading of the happiness which might have been hers. The hero had already made up his mind to propose. The heroine, who reminded her more than ever of herself, would, of course, accept. Considering how they loved one another this was the inevitable sequel, and in their happiness perhaps she would be able to forget for a time her own joylessness and misery.

And then the proofs came.

She read them through eagerly, almost breathlessly.

Things had come to a climax, and the hero had been sent about his business.

How sorry she was for him! A little lump rose in her throat as she read, and tears of ready sympathy stole down her cheeks. Poor fellow! How he suffered. She had never read anything so wonderful or so beautiful as this description of a broken heart before! It carried the reader away with its passion, and pathos, and eloquence! She felt her indignation rising against the heroine. The girl must be heartless and cruel and brutal to cause so much suffering!

It was a marvellous work of art.

She read the proofs over and over again until she seemed to know each word by heart. How it brought back another scene to her mind!

When she sat down at last and took up her brush her hands trembled so that she could not paint. It seemed almost sacrilege to depict such a sacred subject—besides, how could she ever do justice to the powerful, graphic words that described the exquisite emotions of the scene far better than any picture could do. Her heart failed her.

And presently, as she sat there, crying a little, a new idea came to her. Not a single word, not a line of reference had been made by the author to the feelings of his heroine. He had ignored that side of the question altogether. The girl for some secret reason had refused to marry the man whom she loved so dearly and sent him away broken-hearted. What must her sensations have been! Lady Evelyn's heart beat faster. A moment before she had been half angry with the girl. Now she was full of sympathy. A flame of inspiration touched her soul, the beautiful sorrowful face lit up with animation.

Words—the saddest, most touching words she had ever read had painted the sorrow of the man; and now she would draw a picture that would speak of the agony of the woman.

It was a theme worthy of her brush—the outpouring of a laden soul.

. . . . . .

The few weeks that have passed from the time that Lord Worthington relieved his pent-up feelings by describing the acute suffering of his disappointed love affair had not served to lessen the pain. He was as keenly sensitive as ever to the cost of Lady Evelyn's refusal. He was still indignant with himself for the ridiculous part he had played in bringing things to such a pass. At the same time he looked forward, with curiously mixed feelings, to seeing his experience—bought so dearly—in print. He was anxious, too, to see how the unknown artist, who had displayed such sympathy with his feelings before, would illustrate that scene.

The actual discovery was to be a revelation and a shock.

Here was no picture of a man soul-tormented and consumed with self-reproach.

Instead a drawing of a woman—alone—standing with arms outstretched towards the half-closed door—and on her face a look of anguish, of awful, silent suffering that thrilled and fascinated a beholder.

It was a marvellous work of art—a powerful picture, portraying the tearful longing of the heart, the dreariness of the loveless future, and the sacrifice.

Lord Worthington was deeply moved. It was an undoubted liberty on the part of the artist, but, for all that, not one that he felt at all inclined to resent. The revelation that came to him left little room for any thought of the kind—only it filled his breast with hope.

. . . .

Three months later, when Lord Worthington decided to bring out his story in book form, he naturally thought him of Miss Violet Vernon, the artist. The editor, however, on being consulted, did not think that she intended to undertake any further work; but he promised to write and lay the matter before her. Now, truth to tell, the Lady Evelyn had made up her mind never to illustrate another story. When she received the editor's letter, however, it occurred to her that by exercising a little diplomatic tact she might, without committing herself, arrange for a personal interview with Mr. Guy Provost. She was particularly anxious to meet this mysterious man who had made such a mark in the world, and to her surprise and delight it was duly arranged in the course of a few days that they were to be introduced at the offices of the *Illustrated London News* to discuss any further collaboration. It was not difficult to find an excuse for running up to town, but when the eventful morning came and she found herself settled down comfortably in an empty first-class carriage, who should get in at the last moment but Lord Worthington—the last person in the world she wanted to meet or see just then.

It was an embarrassing situation for both of them.

Lady Evelyn was the first to speak.

"Is it friendship?" she asked.

"Of course. How can you ask? I am afraid you must have considered my behaviour most extraordinary last time we

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met. I was carried away under the influence of the moment. I had no right to speak as I did."

"Shall we talk of something else?"

"I beg your pardon——" and then, with a sudden inspiration: "Have you been reading that story in the *Illustrated London News*?"

For the life of her Lady Evelyn could not keep back the colour that rushed to her cheeks.

"I have," she said, growing more and more uncomfortable under his scrutiny, and as the awful thought flashed across her that Duncan Stuart might have said something about the illustrations.

"And you liked it?"

"I think," she replied, "that it is the most wonderful story I have ever read."

In spite of himself Lord Worthington started a little at this candid confession. It was difficult to realise that everyone did not know so well as he did who the author was.

"I am glad you liked it," he said, "for the author is a man I know."

"Guy Provost?"

"Did you draw that picture?"

"Yes. Why shouldn't he be?"

"I did not think that you went in for such intellectual friends," she answered truthfully. Then, with a little malicious laugh, "I have fallen in love with him, you know."

. . . . .

When Lady Evelyn arrived at her destination she was conducted at once to the waiting-room, where she was told that Mr. Guy Provost was expecting her.

A tall, well-built man was standing with his back to the door as she entered.

He turned round as the editor spoke.

"Mr. Provost, allow me to introduce you to Miss Violet Vernon."

The speaker vanished, and they were left alone.

"Lady Evelyn!"

"Lord Worthington!"

"Did you—did you draw that picture?"

Lady Evelyn's answer was drowned in the clatter the office-boy made darting away from the door. Those two names were worth half a sovereign to him at the office of the *Star*.

THROUGH VANITY

I WAS by far the happiest man in the universe when I burst into the room of my friend, Jack Townsend, the morning after my betrothal to Leila.

"Congratulate me, old boy," I said hilariously, "for in less than a month I am going to marry the prettiest girl that ever ensnared the heart of man."

I was so elated that the expression of my friend's face only dazed me for a moment. He seemed to be labouring under some mental anguish, and it was some time before he recovered himself sufficiently to reach out his hand and grasp mine in anything like a congratulatory manner.

"Of course, I wish you joy, old fellow," he said finally, "but some way the thought of matrimony for you brings a premonition of evil that frightens me a little. You know I was married once," he added, almostly abruptly, and then his pale face flushed to a brilliant red as he added fiercely, "and I would rather see you dead this moment than know you must go through the horror of my short experience."

I said nothing, but I was deeply concerned at the passionate reminiscences I had awakened. After a moment's silence my friend seemed to recover his composure.

"Sit down Phil," he said, more gently; and as I dropped into a chair, beside the fire he drew another towards me and laid his hand upon my knee.

"Let me tell you the story of my wedded life, old fellow. It will be a relief to me to speak of it, and it may perhaps be the means of putting you on your guard against woman's greatest of all weaknesses, her foolish vanity.

"When I married Vera, ten years ago, I was moderately wealthy. I knew that with judicious handling my income would keep us in comfort, if not in luxury. I explained this to my wife before we were married, and considered her apparent indifference on the subject as another proof of her unselfish love for me. She was but little more than a child and beautiful as an angel, and at first her delight at a new jewel or a flower seemed to me the very personification of childish innocence.

"It was months before I began to realise the full extent of my darling's vanity, and then, with a shudder, I saw how much her love of dress had cost me. Gradually I had squandered everything I possessed, but even in the face of bankruptcy itself I did not regret my folly until the change in Vera's nature began to show itself.

"The first wish of hers that I was obliged to thwart from lack of funds brought forth a shower of tears that nearly drove me to distraction. The second refusal deluged me in a perfect storm of reproaches and bitter words, and the last time I was forced to deny her some costly gem she turned upon me with a brazen face and vowed that she would have her wish even if some other man's funds were drawn upon to purchase it.

"I was horrified at this avowal, made, as I was obliged to admit, with the practised *sang froid* of an old adventuress, but when she appeared before me a few days later with the costly pin flashing in the braids of her golden hair, there was nothing left for me but to protect my honour before it was destroyed entirely.

"I gave her half of what was left, and then absented myself from home to spare myself the pain of parting. A week later I entered the house only to find that she had ruined me completely, for, not satisfied with wrecking my life, she had marred and destroyed my home until the place was hardly recognisable.

"I never attempted to secure a divorce. The whole affair was too bitterly painful, and the next thing that I heard of Vera was that she was living in Paris."

When my friend stopped speaking, I seized his hand and

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pressed it warmly. "Such an experience as that is enough to lose a man his soul," I said, with feeling. My friend bowed his head and gazed abstractedly into the fire, and at last I rose to go. "I thank you for telling me that story, Jack," I said slowly, "for while I find it impossible to anticipate anything so dreadful in my coming union, still, Leila is young and beautiful, and, as you say, vanity in woman is a dangerous sin, and one which every loving husband should try at once to conquer or eradicate."

An hour later I left my friend alone with his sorrow, and, only a short month after, Leila and I were wed and began our honeymoon by travelling about the Continent.

To describe my wife's beauty would have been, to me, almost impossible. To even dream of picturing her dainty, girlish manners, would seem the acme of absurdity. She was absolutely perfect in face and nature, and the joy with which she received and wore my simple offerings convinced me that, as yet, her soul was free from the taint of pride and vanity.

She should be jealously guarded against this greatest sin of woman, and in protecting her against temptation I would be protecting myself against an agony of spirit such as I had clearly seen portrayed during the last memorable call upon my friend Jack Townsend.

One day at Paris we were passing a jeweller's window, and for the first time in our married life Leila asked me for a tiny diamond. Naturally, I had no wish to refuse so trifling a thing, and although Jack's warning flashed opportunely through my mind on each occasion, I soon found myself eagerly buying every trinket that my imperious but always loving little wife saw fit to covet or admire.

One day I determined to bring this to an end. I had been looking over my finances, and found, not that I was in any great danger of bankruptcy, but that in order to complete our trip as economically as I had planned I must refrain from purchasing more of those useless things that gave my wife but a moment's pleasure. As if to test my late resolve, Leila entered at that moment and flung her arms tenderly round my neck.

"Oh, Philippe," she whispered, with a coaxing pout, "I have just seen the loveliest diamond bracelet, which M. Le Madeau says would look so charmingly upon my arm! Do buy it for me, Philippe, dear; you will make your little wife so happy."

"How many diamonds have you now, sweetheart?" I said laughingly, for I dreaded to hurt her feelings after all.

"More than the Countess G——, and almost as many as the Duchess of W——," she responded quickly and with flashing eyes.

I was completely astonished by her unexpected answer.

"Then you must have jewels that I have not seen," I responded, "for the Countess's are valued at £10,000, and the Duchess of W—— has the finest collection in all Paris!"

Leila blushed scarlet and bit her lips angrily, as if to punish them for telling tales. "I—I had some given me long ago," said she timidly. "I never told you of them because I did not know how you would feel about it. They were given me by an old admirer when I was quite a child," she added, with an attempt at candidness.

"And now you wish for this bracelet," I said coldly, for I was beginning to feel sick at heart, and the horror of my friend's fatal experience seemed duplicating itself in mine.

"Yes, please, Philippe," my wife said brightly. "I must have the bracelet, for it is the only one of its kind in Paris."

I put her from me with an angry gesture almost before she had finished her emphatic words. "You will have to do without the bracelet, Leila," I said decidedly, "for I cannot afford to buy it for you!"

Almost in fury she looked into my face. "Is it possible that I have married a pauper?" she hissed between her sharp, white teeth.

I seized my hat and left the room, and the next day, without consulting my wife in any particular, I returned with her to London. There was nothing further said between us regarding the bracelet or her insulting words, but before leaving Paris I wired Jack Townsend to meet me at Victoria, and as we slowly moved into the station, the first face that I recognised among the crowd was the friendly one of my boyhood chum, as he wrung my hand in an honest welcome home.

Just then I was astonished to see him turn suddenly pale, and with one furious glance at my wife, spring hastily into a waiting cab and drive away without a word.

In a moment the whole horrible truth was revealed to me with merciless plainness. I glanced at my wife—mine or Jack's, I knew not which—and read a confirmation of the truth in the bold indifference that seemed suddenly to be stamped upon her face.

Without a word I placed her in a cab; then, wordless still, we drove to the Métropole; and, after seeing her safely in the room, I turned without a backward glance, and went frantically to seek Jack Townsend. I found him pacing his floor like an angry lion. "Jack, old fellow!" I cried, with tears in my eyes, as I burst into the room, "Jack, I never dreamed who that woman was! Forgive me, for I have wronged you in very innocence, and, oh, Jack, old fellow, be as merciful as you can, for I, too, am suffering torments, and that alone should keep our hearts together."

There were tears also in my old chum's eyes as he turned impulsively and took me by the hand. "Sit down, Phil," he said, with an attempt at calmness, "and together we will talk over what it is best to do, for in this terrible revelation I can see that our friendship must be anger-proof or ignored for ever."

. . . . . .

Five minutes after her husband left her side Leila walked deliberately across the room and looked at herself in the massive mirror.

"Your two husbands are comparing notes," she said, with a mischievous smile at her own face in the glass, "and there is nothing left for you to do but improve the present moment to escape them."

Then she glanced hastily about the apartment and scribbled something upon a card.

"Send these trunks to this address," she said to a porter who answered her summons. Then, when he had gone, she walked back once more and raised her shapely arm before the mirror.

There was the flash and glitter of diamonds upon her wrist, and the sight restored her girlish pleasure. "I have the bracelet in spite of you, Philippe," she said gleefully. Then she made a mocking bow before the glass, and, walking backwards, caught the last reflection.

"Thank goodness, the Count has followed me!" she whispered as she left the room, "for he of all my so-called friends seems to delight in decking and admiring me in all the costliest jewels."

Four days later two gentlemen passing by a large hotel were called to attend a distressing scene. Murder had been committed in a private room; and the old Frenchman, who muttered and mumbled some unintelligible gibberish as he danced about, still flourishing the bloody weapon, was promptly taken to a place of safety, away from the presence of the dead.

Jack Townsend was the first to bend above the lovely form with a glance of pity and remorse, but it was Phil who touched the silent lips, and turning, with great tears upon his cheeks, cried: "Jack, forgive her, even as I, for after all her sin was caused by woman's weakness—vanity."

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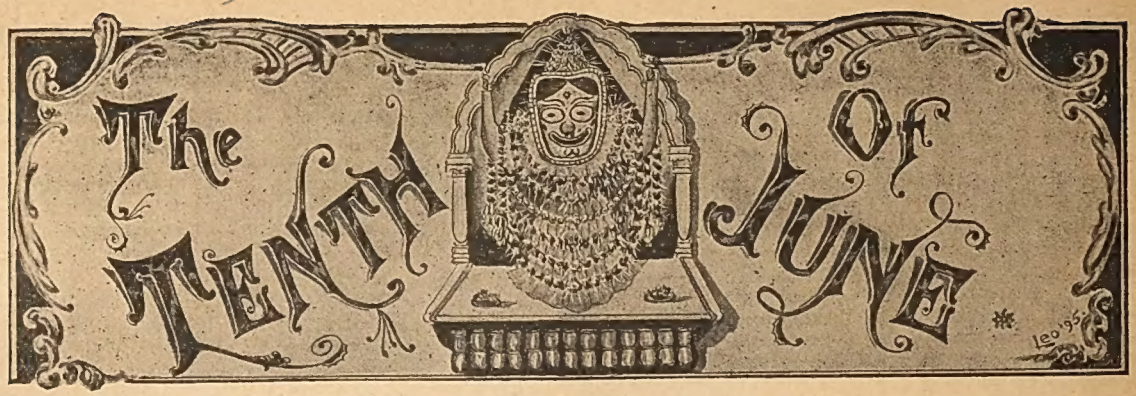

By John K. Leys, *Author of "In the Toils," "My Hindoo Friend," &c., &c.—Illustrated by* Raymond Potter.

CHAPTER XXIII.

On a New Trail.

Geoffrey Dundas did not lose sight of Captain Byngham, on the night of that gentleman's visit to the Hindoos' quarters at Lancaster House, till he had seen him safely landed at his hotel. Why he followed him, he would have found it hard to explain. Sometimes he entertained a half-formed idea, that on reaching the Captain's lodgings or hotel, he would send up his name, insist on seeing him, and then tell him that he was aware of his visit to Lancaster House, and demand an explanation. But soon he perceived the absolute futility of such a proceeding.

If the Captain were scoundrel enough to join in a conspiracy with the Hindoos, he would be capable of telling any number of lies, and of making any number of promises, without the slightest intention of keeping any one of them. To accuse the man to his face, and quarrel with him, could do no possible good. The only result would be to put Byngham and his fellow-conspirators thoroughly on their guard.

It was not till the hansom in which Geoffrey was following Byngham's cab had accomplished half of its journey to the Strand, that it occurred to Dundas that it might pay better to keep a watch on the Captain, though he was only an instrument in the hands of wilier men, than to look after the Hindoos themselves.

To follow them about would be impossible, since there were so many of them; and it was not likely that anything further could be learned at Lancaster House, since the adjoining house was now in the hands of the enemy. Besides, the scraps of conversation which he had overheard had made it plain to Geoffrey that Captain Byngham was to play a leading part in the plot which was on foot. Byngham, then, would be sure to be on the spot at the critical moment. If his attack could be parried, the plot must fail.

Geoffrey Dundas did not lose sight of Captain Byngham.

So argued Geoffrey, and in pursuance of his new resolution he stopped his cab when he saw the one which contained Captain Byngham pass through the gates leading to the Charing Cross Railway Station.

"Is he going somewhere by train?" thought Geoffrey to himself. "It will be awkward for me to start on a journey at his heels, without so much as a clean collar, and with only thirty shillings in my purse!"

It was a false alarm, however. Byngham's cab made for the hotel entrance, and there the Captain alighted. After waiting a few minutes Dundas followed him into the building, and having ascertained that Captain Byngham was staying there, he engaged a bedroom. He then went to the Temple, packed a portmanteau, and took it with him to the hotel so that he might be ready to start off anywhere at a moment's notice.

Arrived at the hotel, Geoffrey's first care was to ascertain Captain Byngham's number. It was 59. Geoffrey then sent for the head-porter, gave him half-a-sovereign, and promised to make it a whole one if he would let him know when No. 59 gave indications that he was about to leave.

As no one could quit the place without this man's knowledge, Geoffrey felt tolerably easy in his mind. He wrote to General Chetwynd that night; and next day he ventured to stay away from the hotel long enough to do a little shopping. He bought, among other things, a revolver and a supply of cartridges, for he thought it more than likely that they would be of use before the business in hand was ended. He also called on his friend Linton, and told him what he had discovered, and what he was doing.

"Let me come with you, Dundas!" cried Linton impulsively. "I am no genius, but two heads, they say, are better than one."

"You're awfully good, old man," returned Geoffrey, "but I won't take you out of town until I find out something more definite. For my present *rôle* of detective—which I hate, and for which I am about as well fitted as an elephant on stilts—I think it would hardly do to have a companion."

"Perhaps you are right," said Linton. "At any rate, you will not hesitate to summon me if I can be of any use—even if it should be only in the way of providing someone you can talk to. I might be of use in that way, if in no other."

Geoffrey thanked him warmly, and promised that he would write to him the moment he was in need of help.

Two days after this, the head-porter told Geoffrey that the gentleman in No. 59, was leaving next morning. To follow Captain Byngham's cab was, with the head-porter's assistance, an easy matter. The cabman received the necessary instructions, and carried them out faithfully. In a few minutes Geoffrey found himself at Victoria.

The Continental train was about to start, and Geoffrey took a ticket for Paris. It was with some hesitancy that he did this, for he thought it most likely, that Captain Byngham was merely going to the French capital for a few days' change and amusement.

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There were very few people on the platform.

However, it turned out that this guess was wrong. To Geoffrey's surprise, Captain Byngham did not go on to Paris after arriving at Calais, but waited at the station some little time, and then got on board a local train. With some difficulty, Dundas followed him, unobserved indeed, but without a proper ticket, for he could not ascertain where the Captain meant to alight. He had therefore got one for a station a few miles down the line, so as to be able to enter the train.

His object now was to find out when Captain Byngham left the train, and this was for Geoffrey, who was entirely unused to such work, an unpleasant and a difficult task. He succeeded, however, beyond his hopes.

It soon became evident that the railway skirted part of the Normandy coast; and at Asnières, a little watering-place some three hours from Calais, the Captain alighted.

There were very few people on the platform, so few that Geoffrey felt certain that the Captain would see and recognise him the moment he stepped out of the carriage; and even if, by any chance, he should fail to do so, the little fracas that would be sure to arise when it was discovered that Geoffrey had been travelling without a proper ticket, would certainly lead to his being noticed.

Now it was to Geoffrey's mind essential that the Captain should be quite unsuspicious of the fact that he was being watched. So, after a moment's consideration, Geoffrey decided to keep his seat. He went on to the next station, then got out, paid his excess fare without demur, and then took the next train back to Asnières, where he arrived about two hours and a half after Byngham had been left there.

Geoffrey made sure that he would find the man he was shadowing at one of the hotels. It turned out that there was but one hotel—a huge, brand-new structure, still smelling of bricks and mortar, called L'Hôtel de l'Europe.

But at this hostelry Captain Byngham could not be found. There had been an Englishman there for lunch, the head waiter informed Geoffrey; but he had not brought any luggage, nor had he engaged a bedroom. Geoffrey concluded that Byngham must have friends in the place with whom he meant to stay. At any rate, the place was so small that it seemed certain that no one could hide in it.

Geoffrey felt certain that if the Captain stayed in the town he would meet him sooner or later. The worst of it was that there was nearly as much chance of Byngham being the first to see him as there was of his being the first to see Captain Byngham. That, however, could not be helped.

As it seemed tolerably certain that the Captain meant to stay some days in the town, and the hotel proved to be somewhat expensive, Geoffrey hunted about for rooms, and found what he wanted in a small villa, nearly the last of a long row of detached houses which fringed the shore to the eastward. The villa belonged to a widow named Fresual.

She had two sons and two daughters. The elder son, Jacques, was a petty officer in the French navy, just then at home on leave—a fine, frank, manly fellow. The younger, Ernest, made a living by hiring out pleasure boats. The two girls helped their mother in the house-work.

The morning after Geoffrey took up his abode with Madame Fresual, as he was standing at the window of his sitting-room after breakfast, he saw, to his surprise, the very man he was so anxious to find, walking along the sands, between him and the sea.

As he carried a pair of towels in his hands it was evident that the Captain had been for his morning dip. But where could he be going? There was but one house further on in that direction. Perhaps he was merely taking a constitutional after his swim? No; he went straight up to the little gate in the railing that fenced in the garden of the next house from the sands, opened it, and walked up the garden path as if he were at home.

"Ah!" said Geoffrey to himself, "I am lucky. The Captain has taken rooms as I have done. I shall be able to keep an eye on him comfortably."

He put a few questions, however, to his landlady, and found that he was not quite right in his conjecture. M. Prébost, who leased the last house of the row, did not let rooms. He let the house furnished for the summer months, and lived in it himself during the winter. But Madame Fresual had not heard that M. Prébost had found a tenant. She could easily find out, though; for it happened that she knew the widow Coquelin, M. Prébost's housekeeper, very well.

Madame Fresual was as good as her word. She was soon able to report to Geoffrey that the Villa Carnot (as M. Prébost had named his dwelling) had been let for a month, to a compatriot of Monsieur's. There was no doubt about the fact, since the widow Coquelin, her informant, acted as housekeeper and cook to the new tenant. She did not sleep in the house, but went in the morning, and returned to her own cottage later in the day. Generally, the Englishman dined at a café; so the widow had decidedly an easy time of it.

He went straight up to the little gate.

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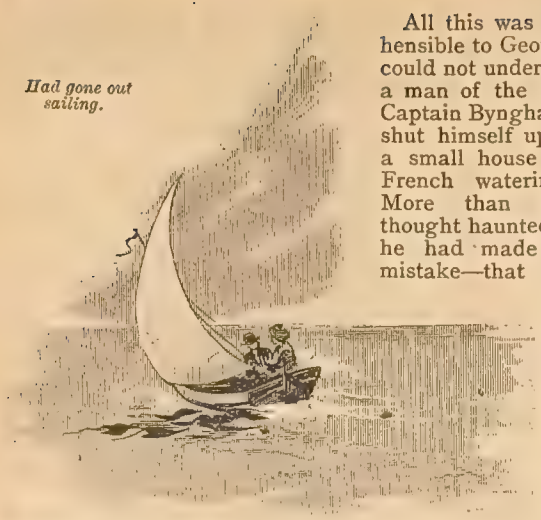

Had gone out sailing.

All this was incomprehensible to Geoffrey. He could not understand why a man of the world like Captain Byngham, should shut himself up alone in a small house in a dull French watering-place. More than once the thought haunted him that he had made a grand mistake—that the Captain had merely come here to economise, or to recruit his health; and that he, himself, was wasting his time, and staying away from his friends at the very moment when he might have been of service to them.

The General's letter re-assured him on this latter point. He could not possibly have maintained a watch over Leila and her father, while they were on board Lord Lavington's yacht. And he could not deny that Sir Arthur's reasons for not altering his arrangements, seemed sound. Yet he was haunted by a vague uneasiness.

As the Tenth of June drew near, this indefinable sense of impending evil increased. The very inaction of his life tended to make Geoffrey nervous and apprehensive. During the first week of his stay at Madame Fresual's, he had gone out sailing a good deal with Jacques Fresual, to whom he had taken a strong liking, in one of his brother's boats.

It was tolerably safe to do this, as Captain Byngham had discovered a casino in the town—few seaside places in France are without one or more of these establishments—and spent the greater part of his time at the roulette table.

But now, Geoffrey did not dare to go a mile away from the town. He became morbidly afraid of letting Captain Byngham escape from his surveillance, and at the same time morbidly anxious lest he should let the Captain know that he was being watched. This, of itself, was enough to make him wretched; and he was constantly tormented by the fear that Leila might be in danger on the coming Tenth of June, without his being at hand to defend her. He became nervous, depressed, and gloomily apprehensive of the future.

At length, one day he telegraphed to Linton, begging him to come and keep him company for a few days, if he could leave town.

Next day, Jack Linton arrived at Asnières. Geoffrey met him at the station.

"I shall never forget your goodness in coming to me now," said Geoffrey, as he grasped his chum's hand. "That fellow is still here. He spends his days and half his nights at the gaming-table, and it seems useless my staying on here. I can do no good."

"You can do no harm, at all events," answered Linton; "and I quite think that after what you heard at Lancaster House, you should keep an eye on our fat friend. You have let yourself get over anxious. I'll take your place to-morrow, and see that Byngham doesn't make a bolt of it, while you take a twenty mile walk. It will do you a world of good."

CHAPTER XXIV.

Geoffrey and his Friend Play a Bold Stroke.

Linton's presence acted like a charm upon his friend. The cloud that had been hanging over Geoffrey's mind vanished. The sense of bewilderment and hopelessness, which for some days had weighed down his spirits, disappeared. He was his own man again.

It had been a dull, threatening day. The sun set in an angry sky that glowed in the west like burnished copper, while a thick band of dark purple clouds hung over the reddish-yellow light, as if they were intent on crushing it out in darkness.

"It's going to be a stormy night," said Geoffrey to his friend Jacques Fresual, as he passed him in the garden.

The sailor took a look seaward, and answered "Oui, monsieur. Soon now, in two hours or less, it will blow heavily—what you call hard."

Captain Byngham had gone home about six o'clock, and had not stirred out since; so the two friends thought they might safely smoke a cigar on the sands after dinner. It was already dusk, and would soon be quite dark. If the Captain left his house they would be sure to observe him, while they would be seen by him, perhaps, but could not possibly be recognised.

The wind spoilt the cigars which the two young men were smoking, and brought them to an untimely end; but they continued to pace the sands arm in arm, sometimes going a considerable way in the direction of the town, sometimes extending their beat a few yards beyond the Villa Carnot.

A drizzling rain began to fall, and Linton was just proposing that they should go indoors, when Geoffrey, grasping his friend's arm, said:

"I say, what's that?"

A bright light suddenly shone out from the loftiest of the windows of the Villa Carnot which looked seaward. It seemed as if a lamp had been placed in the window, and—what was more singular still—in a few moments a second lamp (or a candle strengthened by a reflector) was placed above the first, the two being in a perpendicular line.

"Looks like a signal," said Geoffrey.

"Doesn't it?"

"What can it mean?"

"It can only mean that the gallant Captain has friends out there, and that he is trying to attract their attention, or to convey some message to them."

"Or they may be sending a boat ashore; and the lamps may be placed there as a guide"

"True. I propose that we stay here and await developments."

They both gazed out to sea; but it was pitch dark, and a driving rain was falling. Even if a ship were there, near

A bright light suddenly shone out.

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enough to be visible by daylight, it was quite impossible to see it. They could only wait.

"You have not forgotten the date, I suppose?" said Geoffrey in a low voice to his friend.

"The date?"

"Yes This is the ninth. To-morrow is the Tenth of June!"

"Ah!"

Nothing stirred within the Villa Carnot. There was no sound but the soft crashing of the waves on the pebbly beach; nothing visible but the lamp-signal close by.

"I can't stand this," cried Geoffrey, after they had waited patiently for, perhaps, a quarter of an hour. "Let us get a little nearer to the house, and find out, if we can, what the Captain is about."

As they were in the act of doing so, the house door opened, and a figure appeared, clad in an ulster that reached down to the heels. It was Captain Byngham.

The two friends stood still. They were in the thick belt of darkness that lay beyond the illuminated streak. He could not see them, but he remained perfectly visible to them as he stood at the open door of the house gazing seaward. He passed slowly down the garden-path, his hands deep in the pockets of his ulster, and the collar turned up to his ears, for it was still raining, then down the beach to the water's edge. He stood there for a while without moving, and then slowly retraced his steps.

"Let me alone; I must speak to him," said Geoffrey in a whisper to his friend. He had gone up close to the garden gate, so that he would be right in Captain Byngham's path as he returned to the house. Linton, knowing that his friend's impulsive disposition sometimes led him to act imprudently, had put his hand on Geoffrey's arm to pull him back into the shadow, but Geoffrey shook off his grasp.

"I mean to be at the bottom of this!" he said between his teeth.

Byngham paid no attention to the tall man that stood beside the gate—took him, probably, for some tourist who had lost his way.

"Captain Byngham!"

The Captain gave a start of fear rather than surprise. His face, which Linton saw clearly in the light from the open door and the lamps in the window above, was as white as marble.

"I—I thought you were dead!" he stammered out at last. "You were said to have been killed among the Welsh mountains. How did you come here? Won't you—er—that is, I suppose you are staying at the hotel?"

"I am staying here for the present. And you?"

"Oh, I only came down from Paris yesterday. Staying with some friends here. I fancy I shall be gone in a day or two."

"That is not true. You came here a fortnight ago, under the instructions of those murderous Hindoos. And to-night, the eve of the Tenth of June, I find you displaying a signal in your window. What is the meaning of those lamps?"

The Captain had started violently when Geoffrey uttered the word "Hindoos;" but he recovered himself in a second.

"I ask you—what is the meaning of these lamps?" repeated Geoffrey, without raising his voice a semi-tone. "Are they meant for a signal? If so, to whom?"

"Confound you! Mind your own business!"

"It *is* my business; and I mean to mind it. Are you expecting any visitors to-night? I saw you go down to the beach."

"Curse you, you sneaking cur! Do you imagine I shall tell you one iota about my affairs? Get away, and leave me alone, or it will be the worse for you."

"That is precisely what I shall not do. I shall not leave your side this night till I know the reason of your presence in this out-of-the-way French town, and the reason of your making those signals in your window to-night. I give you warning that I shall watch for you outside your door, and follow you wherever you go this night."

Captain Byngham had never been accustomed to restrain his temper, and he had a very strong sense of his own dignity. More even than the threatened frustration of the scheme he had on hand, he resented the indignity with which he was menaced.

Without a word, without so much as a gesture of warning, he lifted his fist, drew it back, and struck Geoffrey full upon the temple. The blow was swift and sudden as a lightning flash. Geoffrey fell, and lay as motionless as if he had been struck by a thunderbolt.

But when Linton seized the Captain by the collar, crying out: "You cowardly rascal, to take a man unawares like that!" the noise and trampling of the struggle soon roused him. He sat up, then sprang to his feet, and seized one of the Captain's arms, while Linton clung fast to the other.

"Let me go, you ruffians!" shouted the Captain, struggling violently in their grasp. "I will give information to the police, and get you three months' hard labour for this night's work."

"I fancy you have more to fear from an appeal to the law than we have," said Geoffrey significantly. "What shall we do with him?" he added to Linton.

The question was not an easy one to answer; but plainly it was imperative that Byngham should be prevented from warning the people whom he was evidently expecting. Something, Geoffrey thought, might be learned from them, if they could be met and questioned before Byngham could exchange a syllable with them.

"Let us shut him up in his own cellar," said Linton at last.

"The very thing!" cried Geoffrey; and they proceeded to carry their prisoner up to the house. He offered a stout resistance, and (forgetting that he was in a foreign country) shouted "Police!" at the top of his voice. But no answer came. No one was likely to be abroad on that solitary shore on a dark, wet night. Captain Byngham was carried into his own house; and there his captors proceeded to tie his wrists and ankles with their pocket-handkerchiefs, pending a more secure set of fastenings.

As it turned out, the house had no cellar; so Geoffrey and Linton placed their captive in a chair in his sitting-room, and bound him to it with some trunk-straps, which they found upstairs.

The Captain struggled violently, but when he found that his efforts were useless, he remained perfectly still. All the time he did not utter one word.

"Now listen to me," said Geoffrey. "It is necessary that we should see the persons you are expecting to come ashore and question them. You must not interfere in any way. If you give me your word of honour not to call out to them—not to cry out at all till we come to release you—I will not gag you. I should be sorry to do that."

Here Linton touched Geoffrey, as much as to say that he did not approve of his running this risk. But Geoffrey paid no heed to him.

"What do you say?" he continued. "Will you give me your parole to keep quiet?"

"Yes."

"That will do. We will not keep you in this uncomfortable state longer than we can help. Come, Linton!"

They left him there, and went down to the beach, leaving the signal lamps burning.

(To be continued.)

THE OUTLAWS OF THE AIR

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A HAIR BREADTH ESCAPE

In 1870, a month or two before the outbreak of the Franco-German war, one of the most promising cadets, or, as they are commonly styled "pupils," of the military college of St. Cyr was Gaston de Langeais. He was the last representative of an ancient family in Brittany, whose traditional obstinacy and impatience of control he had inherited to an extent which rendered him more popular with his comrades than with the presiding authorities.

Gifted by nature with an abundance of luxuriantly curling hair, of which he was inordinately vain, the prescribed necessity of having it cropped short was a perpetual grievance to him; and he looked anxiously forward to his second year at St. Cyr, and to his emancipation from the too close scrutiny to which he had hitherto been periodically subjected.

"In two months," he said exultingly to one of his intimates, "my time here will be up, and once named 'officer' I shall be free as air, and no longer ashamed to show myself to my cousin Louise. For you see," he added, lifting his cap, and displaying a thick growth of short curls carefully flattened down, "I still have some hair left."

Castles in the air, however, are apt to collapse; and Gaston's visionary projects were, to say the least, premature.

A few mornings later at the hour of parade, the corps of youngsters were unexpectedly summoned to undergo the inspection of the infantry lieutenant, Bouchard, a lynx-eyed martinet, by no means favourably disposed towards pupils destined for cavalry regiments, whom he contemptuously designated as "coxcombs."

De Langeais, as the recognised leader of the band, was particularly obnoxious to him; and his keen eye twinkled maliciously as he stopped short before the young man and examined him curiously.

"Take off your cap," he said.

Gaston obeyed with an inward shiver of apprehension.

"I thought as much," growled the lieutenant. "If that superfluous hair has not disappeared by this time to-morrow you will pass the next four days in the 'salle de police.'"

"You are in for it now," whispered his sympathising comrade when the terrible Bouchard had passed on.

"Not a bit of it," replied De Langeais, shrugging his shoulders unconcernedly.

"Why, what on earth can you do?"

"I don't exactly know; but I intend to put off the evil day as long as I possibly can."

Next morning, with the aid of a couple of brushes, well soaked in water, he succeeded in levelling the rebellious locks so as to deceive even a practised eye, and appeared on parade with his wonted jaunty air, although not a little nervous as to the result of the coming ordeal. Presently the lieutenant with an ominously slow step, and pausing, as before, exactly in front of Gaston, repeated the order of the previous day:

"Take off your cap."

For a moment Bouchard appeared puzzled by the apparently smooth surface of the "pupil's" head, but bent on ascertaining the real state of the case, he unceremoniously lifted a portion of the flattened hair with his forefinger, thereby disclosing a substratum of tiny curls. Then, turning to the adjutant who accompanied him, he briefly consigned the offender for four days to the "salle de police," and continued his round of inspection with a self-satisfied grin.

During the last day of his seclusion Gaston practically employed his leisure in decorating his knee, by a judicious mixture of blue and green paint, with a tolerably exact imitation of a bruise, which he showed to the regimental doctor, pretending that the contusion had been caused by his coming in contact with a post in the riding-school.

Whether he implicitly believed the statement or not, the good-natured medico put him on the sick list, and thus twenty-four hours were gained. His reappearance on parade, however, became at length a matter of necessity, and this time his continued disobedience entailed on him a week's further confinement, at the expiration of which he was again consigned to durance vile for an entire fortnight.

"This will never do," thought De Langeais. "The earthenware pot must in the long run be smashed by the iron one, and I shall have to give in at last. I had better try old Grison once more."

Whereupon, having previously by way of precaution added a few touches to the pictorial embellishment of his knee, he limped into the consulting room of Dr. Grison, who was fortunately too much engaged with other patients to bestow more than a very cursory glance at the bruise, and not knowing what to make of the case, gave the newcomer an order of admission to the infirmary, then under the charge of half a dozen Sisters of Charity, presided over by a lady superior.

Gaston had hardly changed his ordinary attire for the regulation loose grey coat and cotton night-cap, when Pitrot, the tonsor of the establishment, was announced, bearing an enormous pair of scissors and a laconic note which ran as follows:—

"The pupil De Langeais' hair to be cut off immediately.

"Bouchard."

The poor coiffeur, unwilling to lose so excellent a customer for pomade and other capillary unguents, and yet compelled to obey the imperative mandate, was in despair.

"Would it not be possible, monsieur," he suggested, "to obtain from the lady superior a certificate that the effect of the operation might be injurious to an invalid?"

Gaston could not help smiling at the idea. "I don't quite see," he said, "what a cropped head has to do with a bruise on the knee, but there can be no harm in trying."

As good luck would have it, Sister Angelique, in whose memory, perhaps, still lingered the fondly cherished recollection of some romantic episode of her youthful days, listened with interest to the handsome Breton, while he related to her his hopes and fears, and his attachment to his cousin Louise. Being naturally kind-hearted and sympathetic, she agreed without much persuasion to his rather incongruous request, so that Pere Pitrot, relieved from his disagreeable responsibility, went on his way rejoicing.

A quarter of an hour later the lieutenant burst into the infirmary in a paroxysm of fury.

"So, youngster!" he cried, "it seems you are bent on braving me! Well, we shall see. You cannot stay shamming here for ever; and, mark my words . . . when you do come out, I'll have that head of yours as smooth as a billiard ball!"

With this parting threat he bounced out of the room, and next day every one of the future cavalry officers—the prisoner alone excepted—underwent the summary operation of "cropping" at the hands of the tonsor, Pitrot.

Meanwhile, Gaston's position was by no means an enviable one. Through the grated windows of the infirmary he could see his comrades mounting their horses in the courtyard, and caracoling gaily as they passed, and on Sundays—most painful trial of all—could hear with a pang of envy the joyous shouts of his more fortunate colleagues, emancipated for a few hours from duty, and on their way to catch the first train to Paris.

The day of deliverance, however, was at hand. Early on the 14th of July—a date never to be forgotten by De Langeais—the occupants of the infirmary were suddenly startled by a tremendous uproar immediately under their windows, and, on looking out, imagined for a moment that pandemonium had broken loose.

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Such a spectacle had assuredly never been witnessed at St. Cyr. The entire quadrangle was thronged by an excited multitude, rushing to and fro in tumultuous disorder, flinging their caps high in the air, and bursting every now and then into a loud and prolonged hurrah! Was it a revolt, marvelled the sisters and their patients; or what could it possibly mean?

A few minutes sufficed to explain the mystery. A hasty step was heard outside the door, immediately followed by the entrance into the sick room of an adjutant, bearing in his hand an official document, the contents of which, recited by him in a sonorous voice, were greeted with an enthusiasm bordering on frenzy.

"War is declared with Prussia. By Imperial decree, the seniors are henceforth sub-lieutenants."

Before the sisters, deafened by the clamour, had recovered from their stupefaction, they found themselves alone in the infirmary, the invalids, one and all, having mustered strength enough to throw aside their wraps and make the best of their way downstairs.

Each of the seniors entitled to promotion having notified to the adjutant on duty the regiment to which he was desirous of being attached, the preparations for departure were speedily completed. At an early hour in the afternoon the band of exulting youngsters started for Paris, intent on making the most of the three days allowed them before joining their respective corps.

Gaston's regiment being stationed at Lilie, he had ample leisure, after partaking of a farewell repast at Brebant's with his old companions, to carry into execution his long-cherished project of paying a flying visit to his cousin Louise at Trouville; and, repairing on the third day to headquarters, reported himself to the colonel of the Forty-second Dragoons, who received him most cordially.

"You are dispensed from duty," said his chief, "until you have got your kit in order. *Ma foi*, young man, you have arrived in the very nick of time, for before the week is out we shall be on our way to the front."

On his first appearance at mess, De Langeais discovered to his astonishment that every one of his new companions, without exception, was closely cropped. "A very necessary precaution," said the president, "in war time; the less encumbrance we carry about us the better. A long beard and as little hair as possible; no comb or razor wanted, nothing but a simple 'brush up.'"

"Not to mention," chimed in an old campaigner of proverbial baldness, "that a heavy helmet plays the very deuce with one's hair."

Gaston listened with due respect to these well-meant exhortations, but without the slightest intention of being influenced by them; and, on the arrival of his division at Metz some days later, had already, more than once, declined to avail himself of the services of the regimental barber.

Nevertheless, he instinctively felt that a continued refusal to conform to the general custom must inevitably endanger his popularity, and that the only way to atone for this obnoxious singularity was to distinguish himself by some exploit which might obtain for him an honourable mention in the order of the day.

An opportunity soon came. On the 18th of August his regiment, posted near St. Privat, behind an avenue of poplars bordering the road to Saarbruck, had been exposed for several hours to a galling fire of the German artillery, and had suffered severely from an incessant storm of shells, which were beginning to set the trees on fire.

The position of the French corps became untenable, and the colonel, deciding that the enemy's guns must at any cost be silenced, ordered a small detachment of dragoons commanded by De Langeais to charge, and cut them off from the main body.

The Germans, taken by surprise and imagining they were about to be attacked by the entire regiment, ceased firing and hastily retreated, leaving one of their guns on the field, which Gaston, at the head of fifteen men, bore down upon, and, sabring the gunners, carried it triumphantly into the French lines.

"Bravo!" cried the colonel, warmly grasping the young sub-lieutenant's hand; "you have deserved the cross for this, and I will take care that you get it."

Stimulated by this first success, and eager to justify by some further act of daring the good opinion of his chief, De Langeais, neglected no opportunity of proving himself worthy of it. Dispatched on a foraging expedition and attacked by an outpost of infantry, he completely routed them and brought ten prisoners into the camp, and a few days later held his ground for half an hour, unsupported save by his own men, against an entire corps of the enemy.

His gallantry did not pass unrewarded. Not only was the Cross of the Legion of Honour conferred on him, but his name was three times mentioned for exceptional bravery in the order of the day, and his speedy promotion to the rank of lieutenant was generally regarded as a certainty.

At this juncture the unexpected capitulation of Metz was a severe blow to him, and, unwilling to accept comparative liberty on parole, he conceived a project which, although extremely hazardous, might enable him to join the Army of the Loire. His design being approved by the general commanding under Bazaine, who intrusted him with a letter to his colleague, Aurelle de Paladines, informing him that the army of Prince Frederick Charles would shortly march towards the Loire. Gaston exchanged his uniform for a blouse and a peasant's straw hat, and, carrying a basket of eggs, pursued his way in the direction of the enemy's lines.

"It is a terrible task," he thought, "but better be shot at once than rot in a German prison."

Challenged by the first man he met, and arrested on suspicion, he was taken before the colonel of the regiment, who, surrounded by his officers in council, scrutinised the prisoner attentively.

"Where do you come from?" he inquired in tolerable French.

"From Ladonchamps, on my way with these eggs to Grige," was the young man's reply.

"Are you aware that you run the risk of being treated as a spy?" pursued his interrogator.

"Necessity has no choice," retorted De Langeais, with a perfectly indifferent air.

During this brief colloquy the officers glanced curiously at the stalwart individual before them, and were almost unanimously of the colonel's openly expressed opinion that he was no peasant, but an officer in disguise, and consequently a spy. A pause boding no good to the accused ensued, and in another moment his fate would have been sealed, when a grey-haired major who had been intently gazing at De Langeais suddenly rose from his seat.

"Stay," he exclaimed, "with all submission, I think you are mistaken. This man, whoever he may be, is no officer. All those we have taken prisoners have been close cropped, and no one ever heard of a French soldier on active service with such a head of hair as that."

"True, the major is right," assented several of those present.

"It may be so," said the colonel, only half convinced, "and in that case he is entitled to the benefit of the doubt. Give him a pass and let him go and be hanged somewhere else."

"A narrow escape," muttered Gaston to himself as he left the camp. "I wonder what Bouchard would say if he knew it."

A week later our hero reached his destination, and delivered his credentials to the general in command, by whom the grade of lieutenant was immediately conferred on him. At the conclusion of the campaign he was promoted to a captaincy, and in 1871, after the final rout of the Commune, married his cousin Louise. In the following year, while on leave in Paris, he came across his old enemy, Bouchard, on the Boulevard des Italiens.

"How goes it with you?" asked the latter, as they were sipping their absinthe together.

"Admirably," replied Gaston. "Here am I, a captain at twenty-two, Chevalier of the Legion of Honour, and the husband of a charming wife; and all this—no thanks to you, by the way, Bouchard—because I saved my hair."

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MRS. WOODCOTE'S COUP.

A TELEGRAPHIC TALE.

"REALLY, Evelyn, it is too bad of Mrs. Goodfellow not being here after her promise," said Mrs. Hauton to her daughter, as they stood on the platform of the station at Victoria.

"Never mind, mamma," replied Miss Hauton, "it is but a couple of hours to Brighton, and I can take good care of myself until then."

"Well, dear, your travelling alone is contrary, I am sure, to all etiquette——"

This remark of Mrs. Hauton's was destined not to be finished. The foregoing conversation was heard with interest by a young woman of some thirty-five years, whose most noticeable feature was an alert pair of light grey eyes. With a frank smile the unknown approached the Hautons, and, speaking in well-bred, apologetic tones, said:

"Pray pardon this intrusion, but inadvertently I have overheard your conversation. If this young lady is nervous about travelling alone, it would give me great pleasure to look after her to Brighton, where I also am going."

This extraordinary offer, which would have been curtly, or at any rate, promptly declined by a woman of the world, did not strike Mrs. Hauton as being strange—on the contrary, she accepted it with alacrity and profuse thanks, and ended by introducing herself and daughter to the unknown, who in turn stated that she was a widow, Mrs. Woodcote.

Mrs. and Miss Hauton were simple, and, I fear we must acknowledge, somewhat vulgar people. They were not versed in the ways of polite society, and did not know much of the world. They had not always answered to their present high-sounding surname, being the earthly remainder of John Houghton, a big contractor of Manchester.

The late John Houghton was in many ways eccentric. He had started in life without anything but a clear head and indomitable pluck. In the early part of his career he formulated a theory on which he acted until his death. His theory was that there are but two forms of property that are imperceptibly changed by market changes and fluctuations—*gold* and *diamonds*.

The latter being less bulky, it had been his yearly custom to invest a part of his savings in the glittering gems, and on his death his wife and daughter found themselves in the possession of jewels worth somewhere near £50,000, and land and cash to the amount of about £100,000.

This was a great surprise, and almost turned the heads of the two women, who had hitherto lived an extremely comfortable, but somewhat plain life, having no idea of the amount of Mr. Houghton's possessions.

They remained in Manchester for a decent period of mourning, but, sad to relate, the poignancy of grief was forgotten in the luxury of expectation.

Many were the castles in the air they built, and the plans formulated. The first one to be carried out was a change of name, so that it was *Mrs. and Miss Hauton* that first moved to London and then went for a long trip on the Continent, accompanied by two maids and a man servant.

We shall not follow them about Europe, as their sojourn there was unsatisfactory. They made the acquaintance of lots of men, but these latter, when of the right sort, were somewhat diffident about introducing them to their women folk.

After awhile they tired of the joys of the Continent, and determined to spend a short time in London.

Returning to the station at Victoria, we find Mrs. Woodcote and Miss Hauton just stepping into the train. The guard whistles, and the train glides out of the station.

On the journey they become somewhat confidential. With a mournful air and a far-away look in her grey eyes, Mrs. Woodcote states that she is alone in the world except for one old uncle, and that she is travelling to kill time, and if possible soften her grief at the loss of her husband.

Miss Hauton was either touched by these sad confidences, or had a preference for cheery conversational topics; anyhow, she started off at a brisk rate into a cheery disquisition on the season in London, telling of her conquests, and stating that she was now paying a flying visit to Brighton for her health.

Becoming more confidential, Miss Hauton told her new acquaintance about her father's money and his strange proclivity for diamonds; she also described some of the principal articles of value, and regretted that the setting was rather old-fashioned and out of date.

Mrs. Woodcote agreed that this was a pity, and having heard that this fortune in gems was at all times left in the sole charge of a French maid named Antoinette, and an old butler named Johnson, she made a practical suggestion.

"Surely, Miss Hauton," she said, "it would be wiser to have these jewels sent to a first-class jeweller, and thus remove so great temptation from two servants. You could do so without hurting their feelings by having them reset, and at the same time having French paste duplicates made, keeping the genuine stones in some safe deposit vault, and retaining the imitations in your house for ordinary use."

Miss Hauton laughed at the idea of losing her jewellery, but Mrs. Woodcote's interest in her affairs appeared to be very kind and considerate. Thinking of the widow's lonely life, a good-natured thought came into Miss Hauton's giddy little head, the result of which was, that shortly before the train was due at Brighton she turned to Mrs. Woodcote and said: "I have not yet telegraphed to any friends to meet me at the station, as I told mamma I should. Suppose you and I go to a hotel together? You shall chaperone me and be my guest. We can share a suite of rooms and have delightful talks. Do you agree?"

A strange glitter seemed to scintillate from Mrs. Woodcote's eyes as she replied: "Your suggestion and invitation are far too kind and thoughtful for a lonely woman to lightly reject. Thank you very much. I accept with great pleasure."

Arrived in Brighton the two ladies and their luggage were speedily conveyed to the Hôtel Métropole.

Having engaged a suite of rooms, they went upstairs and had their luggage unpacked. By the time they had their belongings disposed of to their joint satisfaction, the hour was late, and they agreed that it was bedtime, so they started to make their toilets for the night.

When Miss Hauton awoke in the morning she found that it was nine o'clock and that Mrs. Woodcote was already dressed. The latter laughed off Evelyn's apologies for her slothfulness, saying that she was always a very early riser, and made it an invariable rule to be out of doors by 7.30 a.m., however late she retired.

The acquaintance thus peculiarly formed ripened rapidly and progressed by leaps and bounds to friendship, resulting, after two or three days, in all sorts of plans that had the common basis of going somewhere or doing something together. Having dispatched to Mrs. Hauton a letter full of enthusiastic praises of her new friend, Evelyn followed it up by announcing that she had invited Mrs Woodcote to come back to London and stay with her for the remainder of the season.

Mrs. Woodcote in London was not by any means a rival of Evelyn's; on the contrary, she appeared rather averse to man's society; and now, to Mrs. Hauton's surprise, Evelyn began to show a distaste for masculine society, too, and an absentmindedness that was quite new.

The middle of September came and the season waned.

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Visitors spread their wings for flight, and with them the Hautons, who went to their house in Brighton, a recent purchase that they had not yet occupied.

Mrs. Hauton was not destined to remain there long, as a telegram came from Manchester, which required her immediate presence in the North on business matters. Mrs. Woodcote could chaperone Evelyn, so, having no anxiety on that score, Mrs. Hauton took time by the forelock, and with but little luggage made an immediate start for Manchester, having her maid Antoinette to accompany her.

Mrs. Woodcote and Evelyn had plenty to occupy them whilst settling down in the new house, as all the servants, with the exception of Johnson, the butler, and Evelyn's own maid, were new and needed instructions. Mrs. Woodcote used frequently to talk of the magnificent Hauton diamonds, and finally succeeded in making Evelyn nervous about them, so that she now kept them in her bed-room. Still acting on Mrs. Woodcote's advice, Evelyn kept them all in a large dressing-bag with a strong lock, so that none of the new servants might suspect the treasure that was stored in the house.

Of course, the Hautons often found it necessary to pay short visits to London, and so it was that one day early in October Evelyn and Mrs Woodcote started off for the Metropolis. Just before they left Johnson had asked for leave of absence as his mother was dangerously ill, and had gone to Bristol, whence at the end of four days he sent a respectful notice of the death of his parent, saying that he would return about three days after the funeral. The house had been left in charge of the footman, James, a nephew of Johnson's, for whom the latter was ready to vouch in every respect.

James felt proud of his responsibility, and when a telegram came to him he opened it in the servants' hall with much pomposity, and read aloud as follows:

"A gentleman—Mr. Arthur Sartoris—will call for my dressing-bag. Give it to him, and re-direct all letters to Hotel Victoria, London, for three days.—EVELYN HAUTON."

About two hours after the arrival of the telegram, a highly respectable valet presented a card inscribed "Mr. Arthur Sartoris, Bachelors' Club," and asked for the dressing-bag, which was handed to him without demur.

Having in the meantime finished their shopping and other duties in London, Evelyn and her companion made up their minds to once more turn their faces towards Brighton, and agreed on an afternoon train of Thursday.

The journey was destined to be made alone by Miss Hauton, for Mrs. Woodcote was summoned by telegraph to Liverpool, owing to the serious illness of the only near relation she possessed.

"I *must* go, dear Evy," she said, "but you may rely on my being with you by Saturday evening at the very latest. Take care of yourself, and be a good little girl."

Miss Hauton went direct to Brighton, and chafed a good deal at her lonely condition. Saturday came, and with it the pleasurable anticipation of a speedy reunion with Mrs. Woodcote, whose absence she had objected too very much.

Four o'clock in the afternoon found Evelyn looking at the clock, and I am in a position to state that she was just then saying to herself, "Only one more hour to wait, and then——"

"A telegram for you, miss," said the obsequious James, handing the yellow-covered missive to her on a silver salver—

"Uncle Henry very ill; with you Tuesday; cheer up. Always your "WOODCOTE."

I will not again assume the privilege of my position to tell you what the gentle Evelyn said on receiving this disappointment.

Sunday was a dull day, and on Monday she welcomed the return even of the staid old Johnson. Calling him to her, she said:

"Johnson, get out my dressing bag, please. I think I shall have some of my diamonds reset, and get you to clean the others."

"Very well, miss," replied Johnson, going to Evelyn's room for the bag.

In a few minutes he returned with his face as pale as death, and said the bag was not there! James was called, and questioned.

It would take an able pen to describe the utter astonishment expressed in Evelyn's face when James produced the telegram received by him, and sent off from London with her name appended to it.

Johnson was a man of acts, not words, and he immediately dispatched a messenger to police headquarters, requesting that two or three detectives be sent up on a very important matter without delay.

As soon as possible an inspector arrived, and listened attentively to the whole narrative, as told by Miss Hauton, Johnson, and James. Being told that the jewels were worth some £50,000 his attention became even more engrossed and fixed.

When they had finished, Mr. Morris, the detective, said:

"Were you alone in London, Miss Hauton?"

"No. I went with my friend, Mrs. Woodcote, whom I expect here to-morrow. We stayed at the Victoria."

"Did Mrs. Woodcote return to Brighton with you?"

"No. She was summoned to a sick relative in Liverpool."

"What relation is Mrs. Woodcote to you?"

"None. She is a friend—the most intimate one I have."

"Is she an old friend?"

"No. I made her acquaintance only this summer. But what do you mean by these extraordinary questions about Mrs. Woodcote? I simply wish you to find my jewellery. I did not send for you to discuss my personal friends with you," rejoined Miss Hauton in a somewhat angry tone, with a flush of annoyance on her face.

"No need to be offended, miss," replied Mr. Norris. "Simply professional custom. We always like to make ourselves familiar with all the surroundings of a case before going to work. What is Mrs. Woodcote's address in Liverpool?"

Having obtained Mrs. Woodcote's address, the first move of the astute Mr. Morris was to telegraph to a brother detective at Liverpool and get him to pay the widow a call. He then called at the Bachelors' Club, where Mr. Sartoris was unknown.

It was not long before he received a cipher reply from Liverpool, which on interpretation was to the effect that the house in question was unoccupied, and that the postman had instructions to keep all letters addressed there at the post-office to be called for.

Mr. Morris addressed a dummy letter to Mrs. Woodcote, and ordered an incessant watch to be maintained at the post-office. In his own mind he had no doubt as to who the guilty party was, and had every intention of making the important capture.

The greatest drawback he had to contend with was not being able to obtain a photograph of Mrs. Woodcote, as this lady, with commendable modesty, refused to have her speaking features reproduced by the photographer's art.

Miss Hauton speedily became reduced to a state of total collapse, attendant on the worry and the notoriety the robbery brought upon her.

The climax came unexpectedly.

One morning Mr. Morris dashed up to the hotel in a hansom. Pulling Johnson in after him they disappeared as fast as the horse could gallop.

Arrived at their destination, which was a police station, they went to an inner room. Here were several high officials of the police department.

Mr. Morris said: "Mr. Johnson, several prisoners are to be paraded here, and we want you to see if you know any of the faces."

The march past commenced, and Johnson scanned each man narrowly. One erect, well-dressed young fellow resolutely turned his face to the wall. He was halted.

Directly Johnson caught sight of his face he jumped about a foot from his chair, and shouted out: "Mrs. Woodcote, by George!"

"Better known as William Howard, the smartest criminal in the kingdom," added the imperturbable Mr. Morris.

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TWO LITTLE SLIPPERS

I WAS travelling in Ireland with some friends. We were in the south-eastern part of the island and were traversing Connemara, the poorest part of that poor country. If anything can give a horrible impression of misery, it certainly is Connemara.

A profound melancholy seems to rest upon that corner of the earth. Low plains destitute of verdure extend at the right to a chain of mountains, which are bare, as though they had been ravaged by fire. These immense spaces are without a village, often without even a single dwelling.

The few which we pass at long intervals consist only of four stone walls, piled up without cement, and with a black roof. From the back of these dreary cabins issues a thin thread of blue smoke.

In front of them one sees children, from five to twelve years old, with naked feet, sun-scorched skins, and ragged clothing, They utter uncouth sounds in a language which is partly Irish partly English. They usually run after the carriage for several miles. With a supplicating hand, they extend to you some sort of rude merchandise—it may be roughly hewn shoes, it may be woollen stockings, it may be a little bunch of flowers, plucked from the mountain side. They run, shouting, hurrying, hustling each other.

"Penny, please! Penny, please!" they repeat over and over. A penny is finally cast to them.

Immediately there is a brawling, struggling, and fist-pounding. The conqueror deserts the ranks of our followers, but the others still pursue the carriage. One by one the small flock drop away. First the youngest become exhausted and stop. At last there are only three—then two—then only one, who, in his turn, rolls in the dust raised by the wheels, uttering a last "Penny, please!" with laboured and panting breath.

About eleven o'clock we arrived at Ougtherard, near Lake Correb. This lake is said to contain as many islands and also as many inhabitants as there are days in the year. Here we should breakfast.

For a long time a little girl of about twelve followed our carriage. She alone had persisted of five or six children, the rest of whom had dropped away as we passed along. Tall and slender for her age, she had a charming face of the true Irish type of beauty.

Her complexion was darkly browned, and she had large blue eyes. Her long run had put roses into her cheeks; her parted lips showed her brilliant teeth. A ragged brown linen bodice and skirt composed her costume. Her naked feet, which were remarkably small and pretty, seemed to fly through the dust. Poor little one! Our hearts ached to look at her.

Suddenly she uttered a cry, extended her arms, and fell forward. We stopped the carriage, but fortunately nothing serious had befallen her. A projecting stone had slightly cut her foot, which bled a little. We asked her who she was and from whence she came. She called herself "Betsy" and said that she lived at Ougtherard.

We told her to climb into the carriage and we would carry her to her home. She looked at us in bewilderment, as though she could not understand what we were saying. We repeated our offer. She blushed with pleasure, and gave us a look, which, although full of inquiry and wonder, was yet most grateful. She seemed to be overjoyed at riding in a carriage. It was her first experience of that kind.

Ten minutes later we were in Ougtherard, a poor village of forty houses. We gave two shillings to the child as a parting present. She looked at it as though she could not believe her eyes. It occurred to me that the wound in her foot might be inflamed by a walk in the dust. I therefore entered a shoemaker's shop, the only one the place afforded, and bought a pair of slippers for the poor child.

Betsy watched the operation in profound perplexity. When I extended the slippers towards her, saying they were for her, she was dumfounded. She dared not take them.

Finally, as I firmly insisted that the slippers were for her, and only her, she seized them and fled with a bound of joy, and without even saying "Thank you."

"Little savage!" thought I, "she does not even know how to thank anybody."

I rejoined my companions, who were already seated round the hotel dining-table, and we had soon finished our breakfast, and were about to climb into our carriage, when I felt a little hand within mine which sought to detain me.

"Come, sir," she said, "come."

"And where do you wish to lead me?"

"To our house. It is very near."

I followed her. My companions were not a little puzzled. She led me to the bottom of a narrow street. There we paused before a humble cottage. She pushed the door open and we entered. The interior consisted of a single room. It was without a floor and contained scarcely any furniture. It was dimly lighted by the feeble rays which entered through a paper-covered window, near which sat an old woman spinning. She was Betsy's grandmother.

At our entrance three little black pigs scampered under her bench grunting. In the corner stood the lowly bed of the grandmother; at its side the little cot of the child. Just above her pillow Betsy showed me a kind of rough staging leaning against the wall. Upon the middle board, covered with a very white linen cloth, beneath an image of St. Patrick, and between two bunches of white flowers, I perceived—the little slippers!

The poor child looked at her shrine of beauty with admiration, and even with religious awe, as upon a precious relic.

"But you should put the slippers on your feet, they are for you to wear," said I. I could not help laughing to see them set up as sacred objects of devotion.

She appeared astonished, almost angry. "Oh, never," she said earnestly: "they are too beautiful."

We slipped some money into the pocket of the old grandmother, and bade adieu to Betsy.

A month later we passed through the same place, on our return trip, and made a halt there as before. We did not see Betsy. I wished to see her again, if only for a minute.

I sought out and knocked at the door of the poor little cabin. No one opened it.

I lifted the rude latch and entered.

A sad spectacle presented itself to my eyes. Around the little bed of Betsy, lighted by three smoking candles, some old women were kneeling and reciting prayers in a monotonous voice. Upon my entrance the chant stopped, and one of the old women rose and came to me. It was the grandmother.

"Betsy?" murmured I. "Where is Betsy?"

In a few broken words, she explained to me that Betsy had taken a fever and had just died.

I approached the cot. The pale face of the child wore a peaceful expression. Her long black hair lay over her shoulders in heavy curls, but her beautiful bright eyes were shut. Clasped in her thin, blue-veined hands, and pressed closely to her heart, were the image of St. Patrick and the two little slippers. During all the time she had been ill, the old dame told me, she had held them in her hands. I begged the old woman to bury them with her.

A tear came to my eyes. I leant over the poor Irish child and imprinted a kiss upon her forehead.

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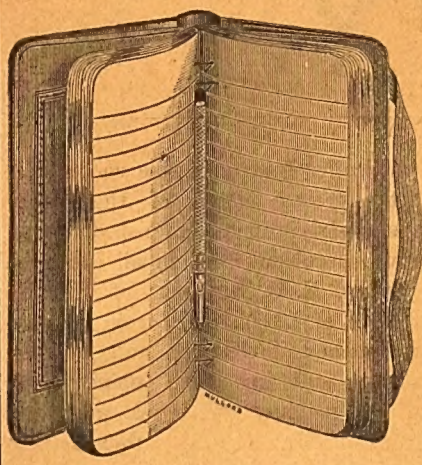

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